Characters

- Okra — Afro-American woman
- Greens — Afro-American man
- Five Dancers — The people of their worlds

Act

The stage is bare, except for a highly textured and vibrant backdrop that echoes of Africa and the Aztec Empire. There is nothing suggesting modern times or urban civilization. From the sides and through the back, ALL SEVEN (7) CHARACTERS appear at the sound of a gong, reminescent of Sikh meditations. In slow motion they assemble in the middle of the stage. The CHARACTERS are dressed in the garb of slaves in the New World (Brazil, Martinique, Haiti, Mexico, North America). They begin a dance that is traditionally African. The movements may be drawn from the Ashanti, Yoruba, or Ewe tribes. This is a dance of celebration. The dance approaches Nirvanic heights at which top point, all dancers, except OKRA and GREENS, dance off the stage.

A violent saxophone solo of short duration anticipates GREEN's opening speech. He becomes very streetwise and English-speaking Afro-American cynical, as OKRA acts out the physical and emotional distortions of "the crooked woman."

GREENS
the woman dont stand up
straight
aint never stood up
straight/ always bent
some which a way
crooked turned abt
slanted sorta toward
a shadow of herself
seems like she
tryin to get all in the
ground/ wit the death
of her
somethin always on her
shoulders/ pushin
her outta herself
cuttin at her limbs
a wonder she cd
stand at all/ seein
how she waz all curled over herself
a greetin sent her chin
neath her arm/ a
smile chased her neck
tween her legs/
waznt just she cdnt stand up straight/
she cdnt
hardly keep somebody
else's body outta hers

& since everyone cd
see/ immediately/ this
child always bends over
always twists
round herself to
keep from standin up
folks wd just go play
wit her/ get they kicks
watchin the crooked lady
do her thing/ & her bones
gotta crackin
shatterin/ mutilatin
themselves til she
waz lookin so weird
to herself she
locked herself up in
a closet/ where she
met a man/ she musta made up/
cuz he didnt know what a stood
up straight man felt like/
in the dark
we curled round/
nobody cd tell anymore/ what to
get outta the way of/ & we
never once spoke/
of our condition.

(*OKRA moves sensually from her embrace with GREENS to begin: "You are sucha gool." Throughout this piece vernacular black dance steps may be introduced*.)

OKRA

You are sucha fool/ i haveta love you

GREENS

you decide to give me a poem/ intent on it/ actually

OKRA

you pull/ kiss me from 125th to 72nd street/ on the east side/ no less

GREENS

you are sucha fool/ you gonna give me/ the poet/ the poem

OKRA
insistin on proletarian images/ we buy okra/
3 lbs for $1/ & a pair of 98 cent shoes
GREENS

we kiss

OKRA

we wrestle

GREENS
you make sure at east 110th street/ we have cognac Okra.
no beer all day
GREENS
you are sucha fool/ you fall over my day like
a wash of azure
OKRA
you take my tongue outta my mouth/
make me say foolish things
GREENS
you take my tongue outta my mouth/ lay it on yr skin
like the dew between yr legs
OKRA
on this the first day of silver balloons
& lil girl's braids undone
GREENS
friendly savage skulls on bikes/ wish me good-day
you speak spanish like a german & ask puerto rican
marketmen on lexington if they are foreigners
OKRA

oh you are sucha fool/ i cant help but love you

GREENS

maybe it was something in the air

OKRA

our memories

GREENS

our first walk

OKRA

our first . . .

GREENS

yes/ alla that

OKRA
where you poured wine down my throat in rooms
poets i dreamed abt seduced sound & made history/
you make me feel like a cheetah
GREENS

a gazelle/ something fast & beautiful

OKRA
you make me remember my animal sounds/
so while i am an antelope
GREENS

ocelot & serpent speaking in tongues

OKRA

my body loosens for/ you

GREENS

you decide to give me the poem

OKRA
you wet yr finger/ lay it to my lips
that i might write some more abt you/
how you come into me
GREENS
the way the blues jumps outta b˙b˙ king/ how
david murray assaults a moon & takes her home/
like dyanne harvey invades the wind
OKRA
oh you/ you are sucha fool/
you want me to write some more abt you
GREENS
how i come into you like a rollercoaster in a
dip that swings
leave you shattered/ glistening/ rich/ screeching
& fully clothed
OKRA

you set me up to fall into yr dreams

GREENS
like the sub-saharan animal i am/ in all this heat
wanting to be still
OKRA

to be still with you

GREENS

in the shadows

OKRA

all those buildings

GREENS

all those people/ celebrating/ sunlight & love/ you

OKRA

you are sucha fool/ you spend all day piling up images locations/ morsels of daydreams/ to give me a poem

GREENS

just smile/ i'll get it

(*He exits*.)

OKRA shares as if a secret the following. She moves across the stage continually making sure that no one (especially GREENS) can hear her, sharing with the audience.

OKRA
i haveta turn my television down sometimes cuz
i cant stand to have white people /shout at me/
sometimes i turn it off
cuz i cant look at em in my bedroom either/
bein so white/
that's why i like/greens/
they cdnt even smell you/ wdnt know what you taste like
without sneakin / got no
idea you shd be tingled wit hot sauce & showered wit vinegar
yr pot liquor spread on hot rolls
i gotta turn the TV off cuz the white people
keep playing games/ & folowin presidents on vacation at the war
there's too much of a odor problem on the TV too/ which
brings me back to greens
i remember my grandma at the market pickin turnips
collards kale & mustards/ to mix-em up/ drop a ½ of strick a lean
in there wit some ham hock & oh my whatta life/
i lived in her kitchen/ wit greens i cd recollect
yes the very root of myself the dirt & lil bugs i looked for in the fresh collards/ turnin each leaf way so slow/
under the spicket/ watchin lil mounds of dirt fall down the drain
i done a good job
grandma tol me/ got them greens just ready for the pot
& you know/ wdnt no white man on the TV/
talkin loud n formal make no sense o the miracle
a good pot a greens on a friday nite cd make to me
that's only reason i turn em off the TV
cant stand they gossipin abt the news/ sides they dont
never like the criminals & enemies i like anyway
that's why i like GREENS/ i know how to cook em
& i sure can dream gd/ soppin up the pot liquor
& them peppers/

(*On OKRA's last line a tumultous somba rhythm is heard. All the DANCERS appear. A traditional Brazilian somba 'contest' is held between all players. GREENS wins. He begins "Ita parica" as he takes OKRA as the 'roze' of the event. The other DANCERS saunter off slowly, hot with the elan of carnival. GREENS heads OKRA about front, showing her the Rio landscape as he understands it. All the locations are in the direction*

of the audience. As the dual ends the other DANCERS enter with a copoeira ritual that becomes ominous in its violence. At this point, OKRA addresses GREENS.)

OKRA
/at Asbury Park in october
all the bldgs fell thru
the earth got lil
our smiles swallowed the sky
GREENS
itaparica is where doña flor
took her two husbands/ itaparica is where
giogo dos santos is nine years fulla mosquito bites
& will die soon
itaparica is not near corcuvado cristo redentor
nor the copacabana
where the children eat off the plates of tourists/
anything/ no
itaparica is not close to rocinha
behind the sheraton/ covered with tin, stolen
bricks & women's stooped shoulders
i know rocinha's the only favela
with a legal city sign:
OKRA
a blue space opened tween
steel/ i lay on you
GREENS
itaparica is an island
a half-day's sail from salvador
one half-hour from itapuã
where the old man fries fish & counts money in his favor
his children row boats like in mindanao
like in mindanao/ they have forgotten
nothing
itapuã with a church on the highest hill
OKRA

synecdoche / out smiles swallowed the sky

GREENS
in land houses in curaçao
the safest place for slave owners
on crests of waves of slaves
who cd not move without being seen
OKRA
our lady of lourdes in jurujuba
collects crutches & back braces
itapuã collects tourists
throws them back to the sea
under the gaze of the master of christ's house/
tween itaparica & itapuã
GREENS

i found a calm

OKRA

a rinsing off of history too grimy

GREENS

a washing away of memories not fit for sleep

OKRA

a burnin salted cleansing

GREENS
i sailed/ i sailed on a schooner
smelling of fish/ whiskey & sweat
OKRA
i sailed to a samba
slept with the sea in a fit of petulance
consorted with winds rough as avenue ‘c’
GREENS

you climbed from those stars

OKRA

tween itaparica & itapuã

GREENS
you sat up in the sky/ began to strut around
yr legs swept thru the night/ you took the
half-moon in yr hands/ twirled her
a pinwheel/ for me
OKRA
you settled on a armful of stars
took me to a harbor
GREENS

some visions slip outta trees

OKRA

others stalk the lakes inland

GREENS

others leap from the glory of the sun

OKRA
you stood up in the night/ yr palms pushing stars
to fall in delerium/ letting me know
all i see is true

GREENS

we are as impregnable as night/ as dangerous

OKRA

i sailed to a samba

GREENS

tween itaparica & itapuã

OKRA
you walked across the sky
to give me a safe harbor
GREENS

i slept with the sea in a fit of petulance

OKRA
you climbed from the stars
in yr new straw hat
GREENS

clouds we cd walk on

OKRA

shadows race behind

GREENS

pickin up what's left

OKRA

the earth got little

GREENS

our smiles swallowed the sky

(*The DANCERS exit to all corners in intensely stylized movement. OKRA and GREENS are alone as if in a bedroom. Yet when GREENS begins "he was a pretty little man" one DANCER enters dressed in the manner of "Vanity" or "Apollonia." She acts out all the narrative as OKRA exits, on "this was an honor."*)

OKRA
some/ men
dont know anything abt that.
the manliness inherent at birth
is lost as they grow or shrink
to size
some/ men
dont know that a well dressed man

is a good female impersonator
that machines replace them & do a better job
some/ men
have no language that doesnt hurt
a language that doesnt reduce what's whole
to some part of nothing
sometimes/ some men think
it's funny/ really funny
women have anything to do with them
GREENS
he was a pretty man who liked pretty things.
surrounded with beat-up luxuries/ old mantillas
from women's heads lay cross his mahogany tables/
bronze nymphs, bulbs in their mouths, lit up
his quarters/ onyx vases steadied scarlet tulips before
french windows he opened when he had expresso
in early morning
he kept a dressing gown/ mauve dotted with black velvet.
he waxed his floors til they shone & covered them with
near eastern rugs/ the kind little girls spend whole
lives tying.
he walked about grandly.
though he was a little man/ he liked to think himself
large.
he had so many pretty things.
he never bent his knees/ that added some inches
& kept him from looking anyone in the eye
there'd be nothing new in his visions.
old pretty things/ used abused beauties
like the women who decorated his bed from time to time.
he sat them on old sheets & displayed the dusty
manuscripts he collected/ the vintage photographs
he stored/ the women passt whose legs he'd pulled
over his hips like a holster.
this was an honor
to lay naked with a pretty man among his pretty things/
the violated thrown-out pieces of lives he recovered
from rummages scavaging & gutters.
the beauty of it all
was it cost him so little˙ imagine him
so small a man getting away with all that.
nothing new˙ not a new thing.
what's to value in something unblemished?
porcelain must be cracked/ to covet˙ rugs frayed/
to desire˙ there must be scratches on the surfaces/
to enjoy what's beautiful.
he was really very tiny in the big brass bed.
the beauty of the woman overpowered him˙ she didn't
even seem to be afraid in the presence of all his
pretty things.
he thought of the most beautiful thing he cd say.

what words wd match his pretty little face.
what phrase to approach the sunlight mad with joy
on the limbs of this woman next to him.
what he could do so perfectly.
he was a little man
& straightening his legs in the bed added nothing to
his stature˙ he sat up & crushed the frailty of
the morning "suck my dick & make some coffee"
he squealed.
she ran out
with no more than her coat/ with her shoes in her hands
keys in her mouth˙ she thought she must have lost
her mind.
but
he was a small man
& cd handle only damaged goods˙ he sat in his big bed
with his little legs bent/ quite content.
now/ there was something someone else cd collect/
an abused/ used luxury/ a woman
with a memory of daybreak in a near perfect place/
sunlight warm against her face & a man squeaking
suck my dick & make some coffee

(*DANCER exits*.)

she always woke before her lovers/ after that.
she never slept near windows/ & the aroma of coffee
left her pale.
& he was a little man/ a pretty man
surrounded with beat-up luxuries/ creating blemishes
scratches fraying edges/ illusions
of filling the bed he slept in

(*GREENS exits*.)

OKRA
it was best to call in the middle of the night.
women living alone are startled by noises at late hours.
it is best to ring twice & hang up.
then ring back/ say nothing.
women living alone are familiar with perversions.
he decided to ring twice & hang up three times.
he felt once she answered/ heard a man breathing/
she'd hang up quickly˙ then
he cd call back & she'd be so glad
finally a man she knew
a man she cd trust in the middle of the night.

(*OKRA starts to exit, but GREENS pulls her back in*.)

GREENS
he said/ she had too much for her own good.

too much what/ she asked
everything/ he said
but what/ she asked
money/ he shouted/ too much money
yeah/ too much energy/ just too much/ you/
dont need all that˙ you should give it to me
i'm a man/ he said
she said nothing
he turned around.
his eyes sparkled when he told her what she really
needed to do was have a baby/ she needed
something to tie her down.
OKRA

(*hostiley, stalking GREENS*)

there was nothing he could see in a woman that was
of any use at all˙ she was forever silly.
look at that mess you put on yr face/ why dont you
use kohl like algerian women/ why dont you cover
your face
everytime she'd try to do what pleased him/
he'd find a more indelicate failure.
what's wrong with your hair? dont you oil your legs?
why do you let your pussy hair grow so long/ cut it off!
get your teeth fixed/ sit over there &
take your pants off.
he liked pornographic still-lifes.
when he cant afford the quarter machine/ he invites women
to keep him company/ then he makes them ugly.
GREENS

(*stalking OKRA*)

he kept the place empty˙ so no one wd ever imagine
that a woman lived there/ which is what he wanted
for no one to know.
if she lived empty & angular as he did, she'd become
less a woman & part of the design/ where anything he
wanted to happen/ happened.
OKRA
the baby gets up every hour & a half˙ she's a spunky
little baby who cries & smiles a lot˙ she needs to nurse
& her mama's right there˙ without sleep or no/ the milk flows˙ he doesnt like that˙ he said.
there's no one taking care of me˙ he thought
her stitches shd heal faster˙ she shdnt take so
many sitz baths˙ she takes too long to walk from here to
there/ she doesnt actually haveta walk funny like that
it dont hurt her/ it wont hurt/ he said/ it wdnt hurt.
dont you remember before that damned baby? it was me.
it was me & you˙ there's always milk for the baby
none for me/ never too tired for the baby/ never too

tired for the baby/ he didnt understand
why she sat on the stairway crying all night with the
spunky little baby
he hadnt done nothing but hold her arms back/ & bite
on her titties/ how did he know his teeth wd hurt
how cd he know/ shit/ she always has time for the baby
what was he sposed to do/ the milk flows whether she tired
or not/ when was he gonna get some/ he said it wont hurt/
it wont hurt/ dont you remember . . .

(*She leaves in terror and pain*.)

GREENS

(*arrogant and nasty*)

he waited til she got out of her car
& pulled his dick out exactly 6 ft
from her doorway.
the car was locked
the front door was locked
there was a man with his dick out
freezin winds
her hands trembling/ her mouth falling over her scalp
his laughter came all over her coat

(*He is laughing. OKRA returns, timidly.*)

OKRA

(*delicately*)

he looked at the flowers on her window sill/
roses, lilacs, lilies & mums˙ the flowers
on her curtains/ blazing tropical petals
& stamen
GREENS

(*Entranced by the beauty of her images; they are lovers again*.)

her desk festooned with strange cacti & terrarium.
she had covered her ceilings in arcs of ivy/
made herself a garden full of soft round shapes/
fragrance & manners.
OKRA
he felt her thighs/ strong & wet.
her body arching like ferns reaching/ she was smiling
& feverish with desire
GREENS
strange sounds fell from her mouth
gurgling innocent hot sounds/ crept along his back
her fingers

OKRA

sought out the hairs long his neck/

GREENS

the evening fog laced kisses round their bodies/

OKRA
she thought she heard piano solos/ she thought she heard
trumpets gone marvelously wild in nature's murmurings
GREENS

she felt him coming

OKRA

& let go all her powers

GREENS
when without warning
he shot all his semen up her ass
OKRA
she kept screaming
WHAT ARE YOU DOING WHAT ARE YOU DOING to me
GREENS
he relaxed/ sighing
"i had to put it somewhere˙ it was
too good to be some pussy."
OKRA
some men would rather see us dead than imagine
what we think of them/
if we measure our silence by our pain
how could all the words
any word
ever catch up
what is it we cd call equal

(*All DANCERS re-enter to do an improvised dance of violence and revenge.*)

GREENS

(*hesitatingly approaching OKRA:*)

in the middle of the nite
is a blue thing
a blue thing in the nite
which covers me
makes music
like leaves that havent shown/
themselves &
when i dont know where i am
when i dont know when i'll see you

what time it is
i lay
in the middle of the nite
covered up with this blue-ness
this memory of you

some poets' eyes see hazel

mine see/ blue
sometimes it moves/ actually rocks
so even paris is not quiet
for me/ i linger by the seine
une femme brune
bein blue like the velvet hips
of river biguine for me
sway in the thickness
air on my arms
holdin me in from the nite i cd
enter with you
in the blueness
the forever weight of yr arms
mine filled with sky
here i am carryin yr lips
yr tune now/ how you sing me
sometimes i even see clouds run
long like sea/ throw me like waves
throw me like wind/ make our breath
like the earth turnin/
never stoppin never hummin
but so loud

(*The DANCERS reappear in a deep blue light doing a ritualistic Arabic movement with shoulders and head swings. They surround OKRA and GREENS and leave them.*)

OKRA
what language is it in
when my bed is/ too big cuz yr not in it
how cd i say
my snyapses remember where yr lips
linger/ unaccompanied bach/ sometimes you
are angolan freedom songs/ we take all
confusions & raggae it/ tosh marley & wailer/
we stroll in our own convers all-stars/ in
london & sao paulo/ but what language is it
big enough/to say yr name
how many colors is the sound of you put to skies/ dusk/ in amber & midnite reds/
if i say yr name wd the words roll like pomegranates
from everyone's mouth/ what language fits our needs
we are so far gone / we dont know sanskrit
i dont want a saxophone/i like greens
say how to reach you so i am clear/
you'd know pearl harbor day/ bastille day/ the

day they invaded cambodia / is known to you/
all that death/ all the bleedin & screams/ are clear/
say how to reach you with love/ i am like air
now/ everywhere / speakin / whispers behind yr back
around the corner/ talkin abt you/ upstairs
in hushes/ yr name/ i stop you outside
deux maggots/ i say simply/
give me yr tongue/ darling

(*GREENS coyly exits.*)

(*Three MALE DANCERS slowly put themselves in a triangle in the stance of the victorous liberators, of Haiti: Dessalers, petion and L'Ouverture. OKRA addresses the dancers who are posed as statues. She moves in and about them. The statues change to become the peasants and the crippled and then again themselves when OKRA begins the long French chant "ou sent-ils maintenant?" There is a strong dance of liberation after OKRA's exit in the middle of the 2nd refrain of the French verse beginning on page 00. This dance is a major statement in the piece: Militaristic & powerful.*)

OKRA
the sailor/ le marin/ tells me
"there is no violence in haiti.
jamaica has so many problems
the black people here are ‘la majorite’."
the children are begging
"lady give me something"
they make his heart sick
he sails yachts for italians hiding from the red brigade
he thinks you're cute & exotic/ even
i think of brazilians/ on emancipation
sailing back to dahomey/ he sails yachts
from capetown to rio/ charters for the french
americans have so lil class
the begging children make his heart sick
dessalines/ are the women sleeping at yr feet
bothersome/ does yr marble horse smell there fatigue
the mensis & milk at noon
the old man with one leg/ one hand/ one
elbow/ does he offend yr
sensibilities
on these great marble horses
will you come again/ some one of you
sweep thru the alleys & the stink/ come here
with yr visions
la liberté˙ l'égalité˙ la fraternité.
come visit among us that we might know
again/ some hope
port-au-prince is a rough town
le boulevard jean-jacques dessalines
a desecration/ les haitiennes paint
like niggahs in philadelphia love to dance/
all over the roads/ paradise jumps

from canvas/ to be sold to tourists/ to take abroad
petion/ l'ouverture/ dessalines
on horseback/ will you ride back
thru here/ invoke those same spirits
you called on at the citadel/ there are half-naked
women sleeping at yr feet/ children begging under yr
bridled stallions/ what 3 horses wd balk at/ one black man
carries on his back/ his sweat falls into the streams
of blood/ the yng men spit up
on the boulevard jean-jacques dessalines
papa doc made it possible
duvalier hadda lotta ju ju hoodoo grisgris
weapons
duvalier insisted/ the black people
cd go everywhere
aux téâtres aux restaurants aux musées/ to hell
his son lights up le palais national like christmas
in new york/ every night
the secret police come out in their trucks/ to scour
nos voisins/ our neighborhoods
can you stand it?
can you stand it, dessalines?
can you stand it, pétion/ l'ouverture?
can you stand these children
with the red eyes & dacron brazzieres for sale?
do you beliee all the prostitutes/ in la fiesta
are from santo domingo/ les vaches espagnoles?
les vaches espagnoles?
now/ marius tresor is an international hero
he plays soccer & sleeps with a blonde
do you ride yr horses for him?
do you salute the deformed of port-au-prince
with yr plumed hats & swords?
what are you doing on those goddamned horses?
cant you see these old women hobbling abt
like mares abt to be shot/ leaning on fences
by the palais national?
jean-claude invokes the spirits & disgraces
le negre marron who awready ran away from slavery
in santo domingo/ to catch the tears
of these children/ who have so lil will
they dont even steal . . .
dessalines/ pétion/ l'ouverture
you must come back
start all over again
no one will move

(*Here dance begins. OKRA chants. She repeats as many times as choreographer desires.*)

personne ne bouge pas sans la puissance des dieux
vous les connaissez/ venez ici

tes enfants ne savent que la mort
tes femmes marchent avec la faim
tes hommes travaillent sans raison
tex vieux sont fatigués
what are you doing on those marble horses?
l'haiti a besoin
l'haiti a besoin/ de la liberté/ l'égalité/ fraternité
l'haiti/ le premier pays au monde sans esclaves
l'haiti/ la nation de l'independance noire
what is going on/ here?
ou est dessalines/ maintenant?
ou est pétion/ l'ouverture?
ou sont-ils qui peuvent nous aider à la liberté
l'égalité/ la fraternité?
ou sont-ils maintenant/ l'haiti a besoin

(*The Haitians exit.*)

(*GREENS enters & joins dance. The other DANCERS exit.*)

GREENS
i dreamed myself in a house of yr paintings
fore you even said diagonally yes
yrs/ mine you/ me/ this cant be simple
this is non-fiction
most of the world is make-believe & predictable

(*OKRA enters from audience.*)

OKRA
our latitudes & longitudes have other names
fiction/ non-fiction
you understand all this/ where did the question go?
he's lost/ in the office of protocol/ check with me
for verification/ my fiction file is in gd shape
i know a lotta novelists who stock up my drawers with
tales to be put away/ song writers who are mute &
tone deaf/ leave their lyrics in the milkcan outside/
somewhere in l˙a˙ private security guards stop motorists
& force em to pick up rumors/ non-fictionally
i'm harder to reach
GREENS
you cd try direct
when i'm vulnerable & survivin
i get each moment back/ i want to know
what we make
in the world/ survivin us/ makes us

(*They meet*.)

OKRA
non-fiction/ unless yr holdin back

then you are fiction & i am a plot
so my silence is a kind of gratitude
how often am i understood if i open my mouth
GREENS
we give each other empty paper bags & ticket stubs
we've been someplaces or are going
this is not camp
OKRA
this is a wide open hand/ unsettled unclaimed
in the hinterlands or ordinary / we cd homestead
we cd parcel it off to former levittowners
we cd put a hold on it/ we cd save it til the next time
we cd burrow our feet in soil & gather up sky wine & music
GREENS

you know whatta breeze is at twilight in autumn

OKRA

the horizon lays out in violet & sepia

GREENS

jets of orange wisk thru our hands

OKRA

that's why my neck gets so hot when you touch me

GREENS

the last heavy breaths of day belong to us

OKRA

non-fiction/

(*The DANCERS run rapidly and desparately across the stage immediately after OKRA says "non-fiction" (32). They are dressed as children. They are afraid. GREENS catches one of the girls and begins "cuz she's black and poor." He lets her go gently, yet vehemently continues the dialogue with OKRA*.)

GREENS
cuz she's black & poor
she's disappeared
her name is lost games weren't played
nobody tucks her in / wipes traces of
cornbread & syrup from her lips
cuz she's black & poor / she's not.
just gone disappeared one day
& her blood soaks what's awready red in atlanta
OKRA
no ropes this time no tar & feathers
weren't no parades of sheets fires & crosses

nothing no signs

empty bunk beds / mothers who forget
& cook too much
GREENS
just gone / disappeared
cuz they're black & poor they gone
took a bus / was never heard of again
OKRA
somebody heard a child scream & went on
somebody sits up nights dreaming bout
children screaming / their mama's
& somebody else who delights in
watching children struggle to breathe /
fightin
GREENS
this animal with visions of dead children
rotting in the woods
children somewhere disappearing
& the mothers still cry out / dreamin
OKRA
mothers always at the windows watching
can't nobody disappear right in fronta yr eyes
nobody
GREENS
yet when yr black & poor /
who knows what cd happen to you
we dont seem to be here no way
how cd we disappear if we aint even here
who cd hear us screamin?
OKRA
say it's a man with a badge & some candy
say it's a man with a badge & some money
say it's a maniac
cd be more than stars & stripes
gotta be more than sticks & stones
children cant play war /
GREENS
when they in one
caint make believe / when they aint
cant imagine they dyin / when they are
cant say what they'll be when they grow up /
cuz they wont
OKRA
oh mary dont you weep dont you moan
HOLLAR MAMMA HOLLAR
cuz we black & poor
& children just gone
GREENS

disappeared

OKRA
we cant find em Jesus we cant even find em
til they seepin in soil
reekin Father gone from this world
GREENS
bones bout disappeared
& they lives aint never been
dyin where the earth's awready red in atlanta
OKRA
we cant find em Jesus cant find em
dyin cuz they took a bus
& mama cant see that far out her window
the front porch dont go from here to eternity
GREENS
& they gone just disappeared
& somebody's walking who shd be crawling
goin round killin who aint never been
cuz they black & poor they disappear
OKRA
dont matter how sweet
dont matter how that smile curls up on her face
what he laughed so hard abt to himself the other day
GREENS

they gone

OKRA
be right back Ma
goin round to the store Daddy
see you later Mother Dear
call you when i get there Nana
& the soil run red
with our dead
GREENS
cuz somebody heard their screams & went on ahead
crushing them lil bones / strangling them lil frail wails
OKRA
/ crying "mama"
& she's looking out the door
sayin to herself / "i wonder where is my child? i wonder
where is my child?"
she dont turn the bed back cuz she knows
we're black & poor
& we just disappear be gone
GREENS
oh mary dont you weep dont you moan
HOLLAR HOLLAR HOLLAR
OKRA
where is my child
where is my child
where is my child

GREENS
nothing
no signs

(*GREENS leaves dejected and pained on "nothing, no signs." OKRA takes center stage on her knees, to begin "we need a god who bleeds." One DANCER in silhouette behind the backdrop dances throughout*.)

OKRA
we need a god who bleeds now
a god whose wounds are not
some small male vengeance
some pitiful concession to humility
a desert swept with dryin marrow in honor of the lord
we need a god who bleeds
spreads her lunar vulva & showers us in shades of scarlet
thick & warm like the breath of her
our mothers tearing to let us in
this place breaks open
like our mothers bleeding
the planet is heaving mouring our ignorance
the moon tugs the seas
to hold her/ to hold her
embrace swelling hills/ i am
not wounded i am bleeding to life
we need a god who bleeds now
whose wounds are not the end of anything

(*Strains of "Mood Indigo"*[1] *are heard as GREENS approaches to take her knees, to begin "it hasn't always been this way." They speak to one another as the DANCERS appear and disappear as characters or emotional manifestations of the piece. OKRA and GREENS to one another as the dancers appear and disappear as characters or emotional manifestations of the place.*)

GREENS
it hasnt always been this way
ellington was not a street
robeson no mere memory
du bois walked up my father's stairs
hummed some tune over me
sleeping in the company of men
who changed the world
it wasnt always like this
why ray barretto used to be a side-man
& dizzy's hair was not always grey
i remember i was there
i listened in the company of men
politics as necessary as collards
music even in our dreams
our house was filled with all kinda folks
our windows were not cement or steel
doors opened like our daddy's arms
held us safe & loved

children growing in the company of men
old southern men & young slick ones
sonny til was not a boy
the clovers no rag-tag orphans
our crooners/ we belonged to a whole world
nkrumah was no foreigner
virgil aikens was not the only fighter
it hasnt always been this way
elington was not a street
OKRA
there is something caught in my throat
it is this place
my baby is sleeping
i check to see if she is alive
she does not know about gagging
she does not have this place/ in her throat
she doesnt know where we are
how it sears the membranes
eats the words right outta your mouth
leaves you suckin' pollutants impotence
& failure/
GREENS
a whole race of people cant do nothin'
at the roller disco.
OKRA
there is something caught in my throat
it is hard & ugly/ i wd vomit it out
but the malignancy only grows toward
my gut/ & will not come out alive
my child is sleeping
she doesnt know where we are &
some man/ wants to kiss my thighs
roll his tongue around my navel
put his hands all up my ass
& this place is in my throat
how can i tell him
there is nothing up my behind/ that
will get this place
out of my throat.

(i went to a dangerous place with a man who was not there/ cuz he cant do nothin' but dial a joke or call for information)

GREENS
you cd tell him a few things
there are dead children out here
there are desperate women out here
the sky is falling
& i am choking to death
cuz of where i am & who we are.
this is the twentieth century.

(do you think artra skin tone cream will solve colored complexion problems during a limited nuclear engagement/ or are you stocking up on porcelana?)

OKRA
i have this thing in my throat
i ant put no more tongues in my mouth/
no cigarettes/ no tranquilers/ i cant eat anything
i shoulda kept my damn champagne.
& ask the coke man for something so good/
it would burn this place
outta my soul/ so i cd breathe
& check my daughter who is still sleeping
GREENS
she thinks unicorns & magnolias
are things to put in her mouth
she dont know where she is yet
she dont know alla black kid's gonna get
is a fist in her mouth or a white man
who says she's arrogant / cuz
she can look him in the eye/ cuz
she dont know where she is.
OKRA
this thing is in my throat/
exploding just beneath my chin
i told this man my daughter didnt know
where she was/ where i keep my child
there are no white men with sexual thoughts
about infants/ she'll know better next time
cuz she aint having this place
GREENS
this gun happy/ watch niggers die-n-fuck
each other to death in style place/ when
they got ads sayin' come & see the Satin Latins / but
dress as white gods & goddesses/
she aint here for that.
OKRA

i am choking to death

(& some man watched me looking for him in the rain & called me later to say he saw me in the rain/ looking & couldnt do anything about it cuz it was an aesthetic thing)

this place is caught in my throat
i would tear it out & let you eat it
but i have a daughter who sleeps well/ & till
somebody comes to help me/ i'll have to keep
swallowing this place/ like the rest of you
GREENS
praying you wont have to hold
all yr respect for human beings in yr one closed fist
yr one fistfull of fight/ that we'll choke
on this place/ & make it somewhere

we could live.
OKRA
please
dont send no flowers.
i dont want no white wine.
i dont even want a roof over my head.
i want his place out of my throat
GREENS
i want james brown to stop singing/ to get the hell out the way
& let a man come in.

(*All DANCERS have exited. Only OKRA and GREENS are there to comfort one another*.)

OKRA
i could sleep with a man
but i'll lay with the souls of black folks
maybe i could grow me something
some azure flower that would smell
like life to me/ a root of some healing spice
might push up from my soils/ if i
dream with the souls of black folks.
GREENS
what is invisible is not a man
but the spirits of some who were
bigger is not a black boy yearning for an airplane
but the gaze of our children who dont know
why ‘we caint get no satisfaction’.
OKRA
i could sleep with a man
i could even sing with a man
but i gotta rise with the souls of black folks
where could the A train take me
i dont know where i'm sposed to go
ellington is not a street.
& my child knows her world
is as rich as people in sorrow can spare/
brash as our bodies in the black forest
but it hasnt always been this way
GREENS

i swear/ we were not always missing.

(*With temerity OKRA and GREENS talk about slug's. They can see it and point it out in the audience*.)

GREENS
i thought i might be in slug's
pharoah waz singin
though he didnt beat his
chest
OKRA
carnival rolled outta brooklyn thru the snow
& soho/ right up 7th avenue south

with our wintry american version of the jump-up
GREENS
pharoah did know the sun
& tabo screamed over & over
6 tenor players filled the front row
the battles of the horns to commence
OKRA
but i know this isnt slug's
cuz lee morgan's blood doesnt dot the sawdust
ayler's echoes cant be heard in the john &
sun-ra doesnt work here mondays
GREENS
i'm not 19 years old either/ in tie-dyed jeans
& pink satin/ watchin 3rd street burn down lil by lil
while the yng ones with mouth pieces & brushes
wait to sit in/
OKRA
this isn't slug's cuz death seems
so far away/ not boomer's where death is sold in packages
it's ten years later/
GREENS

& the changes are transcribed

(*All the FEMALE DANCERS appear abruptly dressed in red. They deliver in unison* ("spose I say you're leafy and you come in five different tastes") *like Vanity 6. GREENS succumbs to their flirtations in dance, ignores OKRA, is carried off stage by the WOMEN DANCERS.*)

GREENS
spose i say i know yr leafy
you come in 5 different tastes/ yr edges vary
you have seasons of yr own choosin/ spose
the distance from yr collard to yr mustard
is same as from the width of my field
OKRA
you know the incidence of greens overdose
is unfortunately internationally unknown
this condition is not due to pesticides war
land-fill overflow or legionnaire's disease
greens overdose might not ever be reported
GREENS
/ feels too good/ most victums smile
without knowing why/ but i know i gotta
o˙d˙ of greens/ i'm sufferin so
my pods are gleamin/ ready to jump out
the vertical/ into the greens diagonal
OKRA

oh

GREENS
greens is planting which ever angle suits you

when i am wearin my grey tie & the doc shoes/
come this way

(*OKRA wanders stage dejected. Delivers the following front stage left in spotlight, as if GREENS were in audience.*)

OKRA
when you disappeared
the night sat in my mouth
like a rush of a holler
how i dug my feet into the sidewalk
when mama tried to take me to the new school
how i refused to under stand freedom rides
& cheap lunch counters too good for me
with raw yolk across my forehead &
catsup streamin from my temples
a parody of my blood
creepin thru the furrows of my lips
tastin so much like yr tongue
when you disappeared
a tremendous silence shook
my body til my bones split
i hadta grab my sinews from the mouths of bats
none of the nice boys wd dance with me
my hair turned back
i looked like the child found in
the chicken coop after 13 years
i knew no language
my fingers had never held bread
i cd not walk
when you disappeared
the moon cracked in a ugly rupture
fell a cursin for the night to catch her

(*GREENS re-enters, aware that he has hurt OKRA deeply. In an adagio duet, they make up. On the line "so we do it all of it", raggae music comes up.*)

GREENS
wd you like to make love tonite
landscapes can be tawdry
but the horizon at tamaris hasn't known a cheap moment
come with me to the kasbah or the tin palace
but wd you like to make love tonite
something happened on lenox/ the train came
you know what i mean/ it waznt the A train though
ellington waz looking good in brooklyn & it waznt
the coney island express with the horses ferris wheels
& junkies on the failin boardwalks/ but the train did come
& it waz good cuz i waz cold
wd you like to make love tonite
there's a place we love & tony davis doesnt work there
OKRA

give me a lullabye

GREENS
you cd hear it
between blue brown walls i call my own
where butterflies & great ladies take respite/ you
cd rest on flowers of silk/ where i wanna make love
with you
so all the trains & vamps/ my runs & songs
the steeplechase hawker/ intervals of major & doubly
augmented sighs/ the cafe in knesset where the sun makes the
meat hotter than an oven/ even the angolan exiles in lisbon
cd drink with us again
GREENS
if you were to hold me tonite
everywhere we've been wd lay on me so
i might only kiss you/ like the night all we did waz kiss
all nite long/ but see/ i really wanna make love tonite
how we live our lives/ so we do all of it

(*All DANCERS re-enter. There is a festive reggae dance throughout the following.*)

OKRA
i've been married to bob marley
for at least 17 years
i usedta call him smokey robinson
it's hard to remember i
waz underage at the time of our union &
changed my birthdate
so much i cant count the years
only the satisfaction
bob marley is my husband
whether our marriage is legal has to do
with where you live & if you think highly
of haile selassie/ the lion of judah
my children are hiding in toco forest
they swing on their rasta red hair / climbin
jungle jims of lapis under the supervision
of the good colored men from uranus/
where all colored men are kindergarten teachers/
where they sing my husband's songs
where we exodus-ed to outta here
where natural mystics
be jammin alla the time
they be raining joy on everybody house
i tell you no lie
bob marley take care of me
cuz he wanna give me some love
been knockin on my door threee year
& he still here for sure
he jump

he scream
he shake he head
he close he eye
he be in the promised land
he wait for me on star
he blaze
he sing
he wanna jam it wit me
he dont wait in vain
he in the movement of the people
he jump
he scream
he shake he head
he close he eye
he head twirl from london to canal street
he braids fall from the sun
he see me
he lay his mark here
i reach for the world
he give it to me
i work i rest i love him in the air
i cd fondle the sky
watch kingston eclipse guiltiness
in the name of the lord
the lion of judah
david's warriors
rise up rise up fallen fighters
show me the promised land
show me round the universe
our fathers' lands
rise up
announce the coming of the kingdom's rightful heirs
i climbin to the moon on the rasta thruway
our fathers' lands
risin up
GREENS
the land even sing & jump
the sky want to jam all thru the day
the stars forget they weakness
& dance
Okra & Greens

(*dancing*)

rise up fallen fighters
unfetter the stars
dance with the universe

(*Violently interupting the festivities, a volley of machine gun shots rings out. The music stops. The DANCERS become guerrilla fighters. Everyone is thrown a weapon from off stage. A battle scene is enacted. The players quietly assemble in defensive positions back stage. GREENS sits, as if on watch, and delivers* ‘i

must go to La Costa." *OKRA triumphantly approaches him and begins her lines. They are partners in struggle. She motions for everyone to leave as if she has a secret. GREENS and OKRA throw their weapons to departing dancers. OKRA informs GREENS of her pregnancy. He doesn't believe it at first. She must convince him. They accept new idea. Angolan (African) music comes up. DANCERS enter on "present yourself."*)

OKRA
our language is tactile
colored & wet
our tongues speak
these words
we dance
these words
sing em like we mean it/ do it to em stuff drag punch & cruise it
to em/ live it/ the poem/
our visions are our own
our truth no less violent than necessary
to make
our daughters' dreams
as real as mensis
GREENS

the earth hums some song of her own . . .

GREENS
i tried to tell the doctor
i really tried to tell her
tween the urine test & the internal exam/
when her fingers were circling my swollen cervix
i tried
to tell her the baby was confused
the baby doesnt know
she's not another poem.
you see/ i was working on a major piece of fiction
at the time of conception
"doctor/ are you listening?"
had just sent 4 poems off to the *new yorker*
& was copy-editing a collection of plays
during those "formative first twelve weeks"
there were opening parties
all of which involved me & altered the poor baby's
aminiotic bliss/ "doctor/ the baby doesnt think she shd come out that way!"
i mean/ she thinks she shd come up/ not down
into the ground/ she thinks her mother makes up things
nice things ugly things but made up things nonetheless
unprovable irrational subjective fantastic things
not subject to objective or clinical investigation/
she believes the uterine cave is a metaphor "doctor/ you have to help me"
this baby wants to jump out of my mouth
at a reading someplace/
the baby's refusing to come out/ down

she wants to come out a spoken word
but i have no way to reach her
how can i convince her
to drop her head & take on the world like the rest of us
she cant move up til she comes out "whatever shall i do? i've been pregnant a long time"
i finally figured out what to say
to this literary die-hard of a child of mine
"you are an imperative my dear"/ & i felt her startle
toward my right ovary then i said/ "as an imperative
it is incumbent upon you to present yrself"

(*During the following, ENTIRE CAST does lively modern dance with Latin and African references as OKRA and GREENS acknowledge their global offspring. The ENTIRE CAST dances off, OKRA carried away in GREEN's arms. Music stays up until they are out of sight. OKRA and GREENS re-enter from opposite sides of stage*.)

OKRA

i have a daughter/ mozambique

GREENS

i have a son/ angola

OKRA

our twins

GREENS
salvador & johannesbourg/ cannot speak
the same language
but we fight the same old men/ in the new world
OKRA
we are so hungry for the morning
we're trying to feed our children the sun
GREENS
but a long time ago/ we boarded ships/ locked in
depths of seas our spirits/ kisst the earth
on the atlantic side of nicaragua costa rica
our lips traced the edges of cuba puerto rico
OKRA
charleston & savannah/ in haiti
we embraced &
GREENS
made children of the new world
but old men spit on us/ shackled our limbs
OKRA

but for a minute

GREENS
out cries are the panama canal/ the yucatan

we poured thru more sea/ more ships/ to manila
ah ha we're back again
OKRA

everybody in manila awready speaks spanish

GREENS

the old men sent for the archbishop of canterbury

OKRA

"can whole continents be excommunicated?"

GREENS

"what wd happen to the children?"

OKRA

"wd their allegiance slip over the edge?"

GREENS
"dont worry bout lumumba/ don't even think bout
ho chi minh/ the dead cant procreate"
so say the old men
OKRA

but i have a daughter/ la havana

GREENS

i have a son/ nairobi

OKRA

our twins

GREENS
santiago & brixton/ cannot speak
the same language
yet we fight the same old men
OKRA

the ones who think helicopters rhyme with hunger

GREENS

who think patrol boats can confiscate a people

OKRA
the ones whose dreams are full of none of our
children
GREENS

they see mae west & harlow in whittled white cafes
near managua/ listening to primitive rhythms in
jungles near pétionville
OKRA
with bejewled benign natives
ice skating in abidjian
GREENS

unaware of the rest of us in chicago

OKRA
all the dark urchins
rounding out the globe/ primitively whispering
the earth is not flat old men
GREENS

there is no edge

OKRA

no end to the new world

GREENS

cuz i have a daughter/ trinidad

OKRA

i have a son/ san juan

GREENS

our twins

OKRA
capetown & palestine/ cannot speak the same
language/ but we fight the same old men
GREENS

the same men who thought the earth waz flat

OKRA

go on over the edge/ go on over the edge old men

GREENS
you'll see us in luanda˙ or the rest of us
in chicago
OKRA
it be hot & then again not
breeze know how to cool
the burnin
GREENS

when the sun force us to twitch
punctuate the air
wit alla this/
OKRA
the breeze she
fan our behind/ tickle the bosoms let the music
free out out soul rush
up from the waves/
GREENS
no matter
no matter the seaweed tease
thru legs make us want/
OKRA
make us want
to swing with the horizon
GREENS

so easy so easy to swim to swing

OKRA

to stroke hard to breathe deep

GREENS

but the sun she want us to twitch

OKRA

she love to watch us sway alla sudden

GREENS
throw the leg round there/ hips put so to the sun
winds like opium lovers/
OKRA
the winds get in our blood
run us to the sea/ the sea she want it all
GREENS
the sun she want us hot
but it be hot & then again not
OKRA

the sea she want it all

GREENS
& she keep comin back/ she lick our toes
cuz the sun she want us so/ but it be hot
& then again
not

(*All exit. Music stays up for curtain call*.)

END OF PLAY.

1 Note: Permission to use this music in production must be procured from its copyright owner. Permission to produce FROM OKRA TO GREENS does not include permission to use this music.